

Message Text

SECRET

PAGE 01 DAMASC 04177 01 OF 02 250837Z

12

ACTION NEA-10

INFO OCT-01 EUR-12 ISO-00 IO-10 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-04 H-02

INR-07 L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 PRS-01 SP-02 SS-15

USIA-06 SCCT-01 SAM-01 SAB-01 ACDA-05 /087 W

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P R 250640Z OCT 75

FM AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS

TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 4992

INFO AMEMBASSY AMAN

AMEMBASSY BEIRUT

AMEMBASSY CAIRO

AMCONSUL JERUSALEM

AMEMBASSY JIDDA

AMEMBASSY KUWAIT

AMEMBASSY LONDON

AMEMBASSY MOSCOW

AMEMBASSY TEL AVIV

S E C R E T SECTION 01 OF 02 DAMASCUS 4177

BEIRUT PASS BAGHDAD

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PFOR, SY

SUBJECT: HOW SYRIAN LEADERSHIP VIEWS CURRENT SITUATION

REF: TEL AVIV 6609 (NOTAL)

1. SUMMARY: PRIMIN RABIN HAS CORRECTLY DESCRIBED SYRIA'S THREE MAJOR OPTIONS -- FURTHER INTERIM NEGOTIATIONS, MILITARY ACTION OR IMPASSE -- BUT THE SYRIAN VIEW OF THEM DIFFERS IN SEVERAL RESPECTS FROM THAT OF ISRAEL. ASAD IS SERIOUS ABOUT NOT ENTERING AN INTERIM NEGOTIATION WITHOUT THE PALESTINIANS, EVEN THOUGH EDGY PERIOD OF IMPASSE MAY RESULT. SYRIAN MILITARY ACTION CANNOT AUTOMATICALLY BE EXCLUDED. EXTEND OF SOVIET INFLUENCE ON SYRIAN DECISION MAKING CAN

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PAGE 02 DAMASC 04177 01 OF 02 250837Z

BE PRECISELY DEFINED.

SYRIA VALUES BILATERAL RELATIONS WITH U.S. AND WANTS THEM TO CONTINUE. END SUMMARY.

2. PRIMIN RABIN IS ESSENTIALLY CORRECT IN IS EXPOSITION REGARDING SYRIA'S THREE OPTIONS (REFTEL), BUT SYRIAN PERCEPTION OF THOSE OPTIONS DIFFERS IN SEVERAL RESPECTS.

3. OPTION ONE -- FURTHER INTERIM NEGOTIATIONS.

IN HIS OCTOBER 6, SPEECH, PRESIDENT ASAD DREW LIMITED AND SPECIFIC FRAMEWORK WITHIN WHICH SYRIA WOULD BE WILLING TO ENGAGE IN FURTHER INTERIM NEGOTIATIONS WITH ISRAEL, STATING THAT SUCH NEGOTIATIONS WOULD BE POSSIBLE ONLY IF NEGOTIATIONS ON PALESTINIAN ISSUE TOOK PLACE AT SAME TIME WITH PLO INVOLVED. ASAD'S OCTOBER 18 INTERVIEW WITH KUWAITI AR-RA'Y AL-'AMM NARROWS CONDITIONS FOR NEGOTIATIONS EVEN FURTHER BY INSISTING THAT SYRIA WOULD NOT ENTER ANY NEGOTIATIONS WITHOUT PLO AT ITS SIDE. THIS IS SAFEST PUBLIC POSITION SYRIAN LEADERSHIP CAN TAKE AT THIS TIME VIS-VIS POTENTIAL CRITICS BOTH AT HOME AND ABROAD. IT ALSO ACCORDS WITH PRESENT STATE OF SYRIAN PUBLIC OPINION WHICH SYRIAN GOVT AND BAATH PARTY HAVE BEEN SO ACTIVELY MOLDING OVER PAST WEEKS.

WHILE ISRAELIS VIEW THIS POSITION AS FORECLOSING ALL POSSIBILITIES OF NEGOTIATIONS AT THIS TIME, SYRIANS FOR THEIR PART WOULD WELCOME ANY SIGN OF MOVEMENT ON PALESTINIAN ISSUE. ROMANIAN AMBASSADOR TOLD ME HAS SPENT PAST WEEK VISITING VARIOUS REGIONAL AND NATIONAL COMMAND MEMBERS TO TEST EXTENT TO WHICH THEIR VIEWS MAY HAVE HARDENED IN LIGHT OF SINAI ACCORD. IN EVERY MEETING, HE SAID, HE WAS MET WITH QUESTION: "CAN'T THE AMERICANS FIND SOME WAY TO DO SOMETHING ABOUT THE PALESTINIANS?" ASSISTANT SECGEN OF REGIONAL COMMAND, ABDULLAH AHMAR, TOLD ROMANIAN THAT SYRIANS WERE NOT PREPARED FOR WAR AND DID NOT WANT WAR. FURTHERMORE, AHMAR SAID, NO ONE SERIOUSLY THOUGHT THAT EGYPT WOULD ABROGATE AGREEMENT. PICTURE PRESENTED BY HIM AND OTHER MEMBERS, ACCORDING TO ROMANIAN, WAS OF MEN WHO HAD GENUINE PREFERENCE FOR PEACE IF IT COULD RETURN SYRIA'S LANDS TO HER AND PROVIDE SOMETHING OF SUBSTANCE FOR PALESTINIANS. BUT THEY HAVE SEEN THEIR BARGAINING EQUILIBRIUM VIS-A-VIS ISRAEL DESTROYED BY SINAI ACCORD AND THEREFORE ENTERTAIN LITTLE HOPE FOR
SECRET

SECRET

PAGE 03 DAMASC 04177 01 OF 02 250837Z

PEACE OPTION UNLESS AMERICAN POSITION SHIFTS ON PALESTINIANS.

4. OPTION TWO - MILITARY ACTION.

WHILE REALIZING THAT IT HAS NO HOPE OF PUSHING IDF OFF GOLAN MILITARILY, SYRIAN LEADERSHIP IS PRESUMABLY CONSIDERING VARIETY OF POLITICAL ADVANTAGES WHICH MIGHT BE GAINED FROM SOME SORT OF MILITARY ACTION. IT IS ARTICLE

OF FAITH HERE THAT FIRST SYRIAN-ISRAELI DISENGAGEMENT WAS ONLY POSSIBLE AFTER WAR OF ATTRITION WAGED IN EARLY 1974 HAD BROUGHT SUFFICIENT PRESSURE ON U.S. AND ISRAEL. SOME FORESEE THAT SIMILAR TACTICS WILL BE NECESSARY FOR SECOND-STAGE NEGOTIATION. THERE ARE NO DOUBT OTHERS, IN CONTRADICTION TO AHMAR, WHO FEEL THAT A CAREFULLY CONDUCTED ESCALATION ON THE NORTHERN FRONT MIGHT POSSIBLY PUT SUFFICIENT PRESSURE ON EGYPT TO FORCE ITS INTERVENTION AND THEREBY KILL SINAI ACCORD. AND STILL OTHERS WHO BELIEVE

THAT ONLY WAY SYRIA CAN HOPE TO SUCCEED IN UNITING NORTHERN FRONT IN POST-SINAI ATMOSPHERE IS BY A LETTING OF BLOOD.

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PAGE 01 DAMASC 04177 02 OF 02 250839Z

15

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S E C R E T SECTION 02 OF 02 DAMASCUS 4177

BEIRUT PASS BAGHDAD

5. OPTION THREE - IMPASSE.

GREATEST ATTRACTION OF EXTENDING STATUS QUO IS THAT

IT OFFERS SYRIAN LEADERSHIP OPPORTUNITY TO CONSOLIDATE ITS POSITION DOMESTICALLY AND INCREASE ITS PRESTIGE IN ARAB WORLD. IN ADDITION TO RE-EMPHASIZING ITS INDEPENDENCE FROM CAIRO, SYRIA CAN USE INTERIM PERIOD TO IMPROVE RELATIONS WITH IRAQ, DRAW CLOSER TO PALESTINIANS AND MEDIATE THEIR RECONCILIATION WITH JORDAN, PLAY MAJOR ROLE IN DAMPING DOWN LEBANESE CRISES AND SPUR INTERNAL ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT.

IF HE CAN HOLD HIS CRITICS AT BAY BY MAINTAINING CLOSE ASSOCIATION WITH PALESTINIANS AND A HARD LINE TOWARD ISRAELIS, ASAD HAS CAPABILITY AND TIME TO PURSUE SOME OF HIS LONG-RANGE OBJECTIVES. BEYOND ASSURING SURVIVAL OF HIS MINORITY ALAWITE REGIME, HE
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SECRET

PAGE 02 DAMASC 04177 02 OF 02 250839Z

WISHES, FOR EXAMPLE, TO IMPROVE LOT OF ALAWITE COMMUNITY AND EXTEND ITS ACCESS IN SYRIAN LIFE AND SOCIETY BEYOND WARRIOR ROLE

WHICH HAS BROUGHT IT TO PRESENT POSITION OF DOMINANCE. HE IS CONCERNED ALSO WITH SYRIA'S ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT AND NOW

FOR FIRST TIME, WITH SYMPATHETIC DONORS FROM EAST-WEST AND ARAB WORLD, SEES OPPORTUNITY FOR SERIOUS PROGRESS. THUS, A PROGRAM OF UNCOMPROMISING POLITICAL STANCE TOWARD ISRAEL, CONSOLIDATION OF ARAB NEIGHBORS, FURTHER MILITARY PREPARATION, AND SUSTAINED ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT PRESUMABLY HOLDS SIGNIFICANT SHORT-TERM ATTRACTION FOR SYRIAN LEADERSHIP. IF THEY ADOPT

THIS OPTION IT WILL BE ON ASSUMPTION THEY CAN CONTROL

EVENTS DURING PERIODS OF EDGINESS ALONG GOLAN FRONT.

6. SOVIET INFLUENCE.

FOREGOING ANALYSIS OF SYRIAN OPTIONS HAS BEEN MADE WITHOUT REFERENCE TO SOVIET INFLUENCE ON SYRIAN POLICY DECISIONS. USUALLY WELL-INFORMED LOCAL OPINION DIFFERS

WIDELY REGARDING BOTH EXTENT AND DIRECTION OF SUCH

SOVIET INFLUENCE. SYRIANS ARE CAREFUL TO AVOID ANY PUBLIC HINT OF DEPENDENCE VIS-A-VIS USSR, BUT WE JUST DO NOT KNOW HOW STRONG SOVIET INFLUENCE IS UNDER THE SURFACE. WHILE EGYPTIAN PORTRAYAL OF SOVIET HAND GUIDING EVERY SYRIAN ACTION IS OVERDRAWN, PRESUMABLY SOVIETS DO HAVE MAJOR INTEREST IN PREVENTING EROSION OF THEIR

POSITION IN SYRIA. THIS COULD WELL OCCUR IF SYRIA ACCEPTED

NEGOTIATIONS WITHOUT SOVIET PARTICIPATION. WE FIND IT
PLAUSIBLE THAT SYRIA'S AWARENESS OF THIS SOVIET SENSITIVITY
COULD HAVE INFLUENCED ASAD'S DECISION TO REJECT GOLAN II
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PAGE 03 DAMASC 04177 02 OF 02 250839Z

TALKS ON MODEL OF SINAI II.

7. U.S. - SYRIAN RELATIONS.

THROUGHOUT PERIOD OF INTENSE CRITICISM OF SINAI
AGREEMENT AND EGYPT, SYRIANS HAVE CONTINUED TO HOPE U.S.
WILL FIND WAY TO CONTINUE NEGOTIATING EFFORT UNDER CONDITIONS
WHICH THEY HAVE IMPOSED. IF THIS IS NOT POSSIBLE AT PRESENT
THEY NEVERTHELESS RECOGNIZE AND RESPECT NECESSITY FOR CONTINUED

U.S. INVOLVEMENT IN PEACE PROCESS. THEY ALSO HAVE BEEN
CAREFUL NOT TO LET DIFFERENCES OVER COURSE AND PACE OF
NEGOTIATIONS COLOR BILATERAL U.S.-SYRIAN RELATIONS.
BY TONE OF HIS MESSAGES, HIS WILLINGNESS TO CONDUCT
DIALOGUE WITH U.S. ON AREA PROBLEMS AND CONTINUING

WELCOME BEING SHOWN U.S. BUSINESSMEN AND AID PROGRAM
WITHIN SARG, ASAD IS DEMONSTRATING THAT HE VALUES BILATERAL
RELATIONSHIP WITH U.S. AND WISHES IT TO CONTINUE.
MURPHY

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